

THE
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OF
EVENING READINGS
FOR
Members of the English Church.

EDITED BY CHARLOTTE M. YONGE,
AUTHOR OF 'THE HEIR OF REDCLIFFE.'

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'TRUE AND JUST IN ALL MY DEALINGS.'

'Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away,'

CHANGING them and their surroundings, 'from year to year—ay, even from day to day,' and so it is that 'grannie,' who once found Mrs. Twitch such an unfailing friend, is now forced to leave her, like Mrs. Unwin's knitting needles, 'to rust unseen and shine no more,' gout having disabled the fingers that used to guide the one-eyed little lady's rapid movements.

And Tottie, and Fats, and Tiny, and even their successor, Number 4, or Nisa, as she is sometimes called, are grown into school-room young ladies, and 'the boys,' younger still, are gone off to school.

One evening little Nisa was grannie's companion, and was sitting at her feet with the cats and Chloe, reading, for grannie had fallen asleep.

She woke at last, with a sort of stifled cry, and Nisa looked up from her book.

'What *have* you been dreaming about, grannie?'

'As miserable a dream as poor Clarence's was; but how did you know anything about it?'

'I heard you say, "Mr. Bowen told me," in such a sorrowful voice. I thought I would wake you, but you turned a little, and then you said nothing more, till just before you woke; and then you said, in a sort of frightened way, something like Ariel, or Urian——'

'Ithuriel it must have been,' said grannie. 'Ring for tea, and after tea I'll try and tell you all about it.'

So tea was brought with the little old silver muffineer, and the tiny cream-ewer, and real dragon china cups and saucers, which only appeared on what old Nurse called 'high days and holidays and bon-fire nights,' dear to grannie for the many associations they recalled—to the children, for the 'lots of old stories' of which they reminded her.

'It will be a brand-new story to-night, grannie,' said Nisa, after seeing that the old cat had his fair share of the milk, and giving Chloe her customary bit of sugar. 'What could make you dream of Mr. Bowen?'

'Not the Mr. Bowen you are thinking of, but an old gentleman, a friend of my father's, who came to stay with us when I was just

grown up. He gave me a sort of lecture I shall never forget—indeed,' grannie added, after a moment's pause, 'please God I come to "the land of the leal," he will be one of those I have to thank.*

'Whether he thought I was likely to be extravagant, or whether anything especially sad had come before his Court (he was what was then called a Commissioner in Bankruptcy) I never knew; but to this day I distinctly remember the corner of the sofa where he sat, and the window, by which I stood listening, as he told me of the fearful misery he had known, all caused by ladies not paying their bills, and the exceeding distress that so often arose, from young ladies especially, getting into debt and marrying, and being afraid to tell their husbands.'

'And you dreamt about all this, grannie?'

'Yes; before I fell asleep I took up the book you were reading, about poor Lady Keith, and the bills that Colonel Keith and Rachel found after she was gone. I suppose they brought Mr. Bowen and his good advice back to my memory, for I dreamt I was staying either with your aunt in Onslow Gardens, or with your cousin in Lowndes Street, and that some one said "Where will you go to church?" and I said "Oh, to S. James's, of course;" but certainly the church in my dream was not S. James's, though rather like it, with great, heavy galleries, and I sat in one of them. I don't remember any service; the sermon seemed to begin at once, and the text was that verse in Deuteronomy about a just balance.

'And suddenly, there seemed to come rolling in at the windows thick clouds of cold grey London fog, and there was what John Bunyan calls a "Shining One" moving about among the congregation, and all whom he touched seemed to lose some part of their garments—one young man near me seemed to lose everything he wore, and but for the thick fog that covered him up entirely, he would have been like Carlyle's "naked Duke of Windlestraw," and so would the lady beside him.

'O, grannie!' said Nisa, laughing, 'I should like to dream such funny things.'

'I assure you it seemed much too shocking in my dream to be funny—all the more, that a sort of cold shudder came over me, and a wondering if all I had on was really my own, and not my dress-maker's—and then a self-questioning as to whether I had always paid my bills as punctually as I ought, and through it all I seemed to hear the preacher's voice, joining those terrible words of S. James to his text; and then, there are no surprises in dreams you know. I turned round and saw Herodias, beside me, just exactly as she is in that awful picture of Rubens—in the great Amsterdam Bible—and she had just that horrible look, as if she said, "*I am not to blame for this.*"

* See *Christian Year*, Lines for Easter Eve':

'Thank them all for helping us in thrall.'

And another shining one came, and I knew it was Ithuriel; and he touched her with his spear, and, oh it was horrible! All the untrue things she had ever said seemed to come flying out of her mouth, like the toads and frogs in the fairy tale; and there was worse still, for a second time Ithuriel touched her and made her tell how often she had harmed others, by making them say what was not true. I woke just as she was arguing with Ithuriel—that she was not any worse than others—everybody did so—and through it all I seemed to hear the preacher's voice, saying, "Follow not a multitude to do evil." This part of the dream must have been from what Mary K—— was telling me the other day about the young parlour-maid, whom she was entreating to come to Holy Communion.'

'What was that, grannie?'

'The poor girl said, "I can *now*, ma'am, for *you* don't expect me to tell lies for you. I could not go to Holy Communion, and know that perhaps that very day I might have to say mistress was not at home, when I knew all the time she was." '*

R. L. C.

* A fact.